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THE RAILROAD TO MECCA.

This map of the projected railroad between Damascus and Mecca, the northern part of which is now building, is taken from the *Geographischer Anzeiger*, published by Justus Perthes, Gotha (July, 1902). The railroad has been heralded throughout the Mohammedan world as a facility to be provided for pilgrims to the holy city, giving them quick and easy transport across the thirsty desert of western Arabia. The distance by rail between Damascus and Mecca will be about 1,250 miles; as the Hauran railroad, already completed, will be utilized for 63 miles south of Damascus, the Mecca road proper will be a little less than 1,200 miles in length.

The estimated cost is over \$40,000,000, and the Sultan of Turkey is depending upon the voluntary contributions of Islam for the necessary funds. Contributions to the amount of nearly \$2,000,000 were received within a comparatively short time after the Sultan's enterprise had been announced, and, with this money in the treasury, work was begun about the middle of last year. At last accounts it was expected to complete the roadbed to a point 125 miles south of Damascus by the end of August, this year.

The projected line follows an old pilgrim route through the almost waterless desert, very sparsely inhabited by wandering Bedouins. As very little of Arabia has yet been studied in relation to its economic importance, the value of the line to the development of the country cannot be foretold. It may be that the road will give accessibility to important sources of minerals and ores, and thus have economic value; but this remains to be shown.

The utility of the railroad in religious and political senses is the aspect of the enterprise that most appeals to Mohammedans and to the Turkish Government, which has set the project on foot. The various sects of Islam, though opposed to one another on some questions of faith, are in enthusiastic accord, it is said, as to the desirability of making Mecca and Medina, the one the burial place and the other the birthplace of Mohammed, accessible to pilgrims by rail. The project interests not only Mohammedans of the Turkish Empire, Russian Turkistan, and Persia (who would be most directly benefited by the Hedjaz or Pilgrim line, as it is called), but also those of India, Java, North Africa, and other regions, who reach Mecca *via* the Red Sea and Jiddah; the railroad would enable them to visit both Mecca and Medina, while the majority are now



compelled to confine their pilgrimage to Mecca. Contributions are accordingly being received from all parts of the world where Mohammedans live, including even Cape Colony and Australia.

The leading motive of the Sublime Porte is believed to be its political exigencies. At present Turkey is practically cut off from a large part of its possessions in Arabia. The movement of Turkish troops between the holy cities and Turkey is now very difficult. As the present head of the Mohammedan faith, the Sultan cannot retain his prestige without insuring his authority over the pilgrim routes and the holy cities. The fact that he is losing his authority in southern Arabia is shown by the British assumption, in recent years, of a protectorate over the entire southern coast of Arabia from the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb to the Sultanate of Maskat. It remains to be seen whether the entire sum required to build the road can be secured by voluntary contributions. The work thus far is in charge of German engineers, with assistants from the Turkish Engineer Corps.